

## The Ancient Quarter of Hanoi – A Reflection of Urban Transition Processes

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*This paper describes the effects of the Doi Moi policy, the latest stage in a series of historical transitions, on the urban landscape of Vietnam's oldest existing trade, market, and retail estate, the Ancient Quarter of Hanoi or 36 Streets Quarter. Economic liberalisation and the opening up to global capital have caused an enormous economic revitalization of this traditional quarter; however, 'beneficiaries of transition' have initiated a dramatic building and renovation boom. Although local, national and international agencies have formulated many plans to preserve the historic ambiance of the Quarter, many of the traditional tube-shape houses have been destroyed. The main reason for this development is to be found in delays typical of transition periods, as state institutions move beyond the centrally organized economy and adapt to a pluralistic market economy, as well as insufficient resources and the failure to enforce architectural guidelines. In general, the recent development of Hanoi shows similarities to many Eastern European cities, where distinct actor groups have initiated processes typical of transition, such as the rapid emergence of private enterprises, suburbanization processes, social as well as spatial polarization, the fast-track development of a Central Business District and catching up with internationalization and modernization processes.*

Since its 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in December 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam has followed a course of reform under the slogan 'Doi Moi' (translated as 'Renovation Policy'), which attempts to combine single political party rule with the introduction of a system based on a modern, pluralistic market economy. Though this transition process is only being introduced gradually, it has still led to numerous problems in many societal areas and at every administrative level. This is because the centralised state planning system has been confronted with the dynamic, unregulated developments associated with a market economy (Logan 2000: 260).

Without doubt, the market-oriented reforms introduced during the course of Doi Moi have rapidly brought remarkable economic success to Vietnam, have freed the country from its isolating foreign policy and have finally instigated the processes of internationalization and modernization. However, the Viet Nam Living Standards Surveys jointly conducted by the State Planning Committee and the General Statistical Office in 1992-1993 and in 1997-1998 on a country-wide scale as well as the 2002 Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey clearly proved that the economic boom has not affected all regions in Vietnam equally. The areas which have profited most are the largest cities – the economic hub of Ho Chi Minh City in the south and the capital Hanoi in the north (General Statistical Office & United Nations Development Programme 2001: 91; Beresford 2003: 67f.). Similarly as in the transition

countries of Eastern Europe, the metropolitan areas represent main target regions for flows of foreign direct investment (FDI) and display by far the highest per capita incomes in the country (Fassmann 1999: 17). The negative effects of the Doi Moi policy are also more evident there: for instance, the rise in intra-urban disparities which is accompanied by an increasing polarization of income (Boothroyd & Nam 2000: 158f.; Smith & Scarpaci 2000: 751f.), rising unemployment rates, an increase in environmental pollution (DiGregorio et al. 2003: 180f.), crime rates, prostitution and corruption as well as the emergence of slum-like settlements as a consequence of the growing pressure to migrate from rural areas.

The complex dynamics of the transition process of the national state are well illustrated in the changes which have occurred in the famous Ancient Quarter of Hanoi.

The Ancient Quarter of Hanoi, located north of Hoan Kiem Lake, east of the former Imperial Citadel and west of the Red River, is Vietnam's oldest existing trade, market and retail estate. It is the heart and soul of the city, a prized legacy of Hanoi's past as well as a unique part of the Vietnamese urban identity and national mythology (Templer 1998: 229; Boudarel & Ky 2002: 1f). Along with the charming French colonial quarter, it forms part of Hanoi's city centre. Together, these areas constitute what is possibly the most beautiful urban landscape in South-East Asia.

### **The Historical Development**

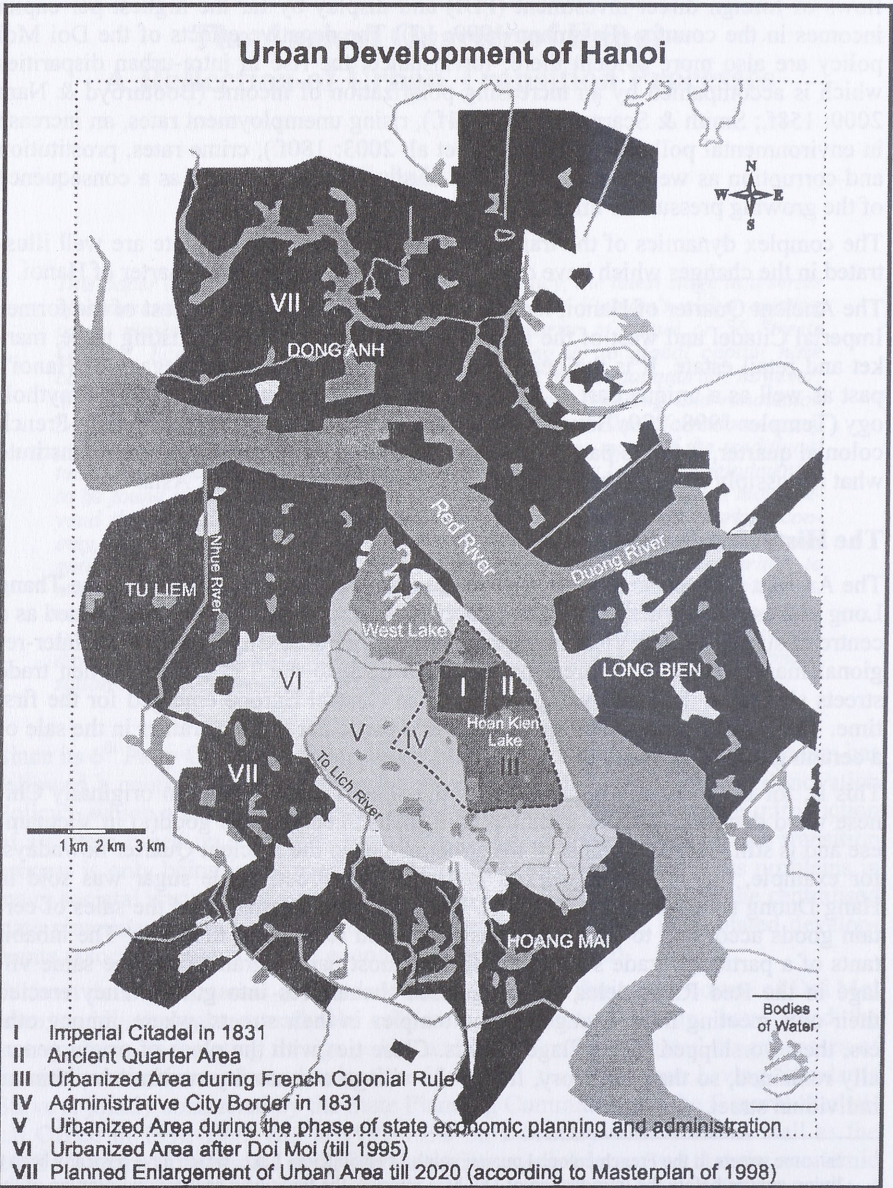
The Ancient Quarter, in existence since the city was founded under the name Thang Long (the ascending dragon) in the year 1010 A.D. (Papin 2001: 64), originated as a centre of supply for the Vietnamese rulers in the Imperial City as well as an inter-regional market place. The street pattern goes back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when trade streets similar to the medieval guild streets in Central Europe emerged for the first time. These trade streets each specialized in a particular craft, or rather in the sale of a certain group of goods.

This is, for instance, still apparent from the street names: Hang (an originally Chinese word denoting store or commercial establishment) means good(s) in Vietnamese and is still a prefix of most of the street names in the Ancient Quarter nowadays: for example, the silk-dyers worked in Hang Dao street, while sugar was sold in Hang Duong street (Papin 2001: 174). The spatial concentration of the sales of certain goods according to streets has basically been retained to this day.<sup>1</sup> The inhabitants of a particular trade street were for the most part migrants from the same village in the Red River delta, who organised themselves into guilds. They erected their own meeting houses, pagodas and temples in their streets, where, among others, they worshipped their village's saints. Close ties with the place of origin generally remained, so that, in theory, life in the village community continued within an individual street.

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<sup>1</sup> In some streets in the French colonial quarter south of Hoan Kiem Lake, which have basically been a living quarter before the introduction of Doi Moi reforms, the traditional spatial concentration of the sales of goods, formerly unknown in North-Vietnam like (HiFi-Equipment, air-conditioning machines, modern refrigerators or washing machines) emerged as well. Besides, a spatial concentration is quite common in South-East Asia, Rivet (2000: 189f.) precisely describes this phenomenon in the case of Yangon/Myanmar.

Fig. 1: Periods of Growth of Hanoi as a consequence of transition processes



Source: M. Waibel 2003<sup>A</sup>; Base Map: Hung, Tran & Thong, Nguyen Quoc 1995: 136.

Over the centuries, the constant division of properties led to the emergence of so-called tunnel or tube houses, which, despite an extremely small opening onto the street, could be as long as 100 m. Family units lived and worked in these tube houses and sold their own handicraft from there.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Quarter was more and more influenced by an influx of Chinese, who were segregated in their own streets and worked predominantly as retailers (Amer 1992: 25; Azambre 1995: 361). Until French colonization, the trade streets were characterised by a strong autonomy, which was also symbolised structurally by medieval masonry gateways or wooden slats at both ends, which were shut at night.

With the shifting of the capital to Phu Xuan (today's Hue) by the founder of the Nguyen Dynasty, Emperor Gia Long, in 1802, the Imperial City was shrinking and falling into ruins (Nishimura/Phe 1990: 3). In contrast, the economic activities within the Ancient Quarter continued to flourish due to exemption of restrictions imposed by the court. Consequently, the Ancient Quarter area enlarged and also more foreign trade relations could be established (Papin 2001: 204; Khoi 1969: 314).

The second ruler of the Nguyen Dynasty, Emperor Minh Mang, finally decided to rename the former capital into its today's name Hanoi which literally means "The city located inside the rivers" in the year 1831 (Phuc 1995: 31; Papin 2001: 198). In inducing this, he wanted to eliminate finally the still popular name "Long" meaning dragon which constituted an imperial symbol which should not be associated with the old capital anymore.

### **Hanoi under French Colonial Rule**

The French colonial era in Hanoi led to a bipolar type of city, typical of many colonial cities, which were characterized by a spatial, social and economic division of the city into native and French quarters (McGee 1967: 63). The French designated Hanoi as capital city of the Tonkin protectorate in 1883 and as administrative headquarters of the Indo-Chinese Union after 1902 (Papin 2001: 225). Hanoi was, as the 'Paris de l'Annam', supposed to become a smaller copy of the French capital in South-East Asia; this was motivated by, on the one hand, political reasons and, on the other, the awareness of their 'Mission civilisatrice' (Wright 1991: 199). Symbols of power of the pre-colonial regents such as the former Imperial Citadel, which had been re-constructed at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the help of French engineers, were demolished in the process. The Bao Thien pagoda, one of the most important Buddhist sacred buildings in Vietnam which had existed since the founding of Hanoi, was also a casualty of the monumental St. Joseph Cathedral (Pédela-hore 1993: 27f.).

At the drawing-board, the French designed sprawling and expensive living and administrative quarters criss-crossed by Haussmann-like boulevards. Altogether, the area of the city expanded a great deal through these building activities. The sense of mission of the French is most evident in the neo-baroque style of the Municipal Theatre for which the Parisian Opera, finished a couple of decades earlier, was used

as a model. As probably the most impressive of their stately buildings it had, with its completion in 1911, a greater number of seats than French people living in the city (Koperdraat 1998: 32).

The work of the French colonial rulers also led to far-reaching changes in the Ancient Quarter (Marr 2002: 309). The physiognomic appearance of the district was lastingly altered with the draining and filling-in of standing and flowing bodies of water, the upgrading of the network of streets as well as the dismantling of the trade street gates. The facades of the houses built at that time were similar to those of the Chinese 'shophouses', which could then be found in all city trading centres in South-East Asia and South China (Ginsburg 1955: 459).

The structure of social and business relations was also changed. The autonomy of the traditional trade streets was nullified through the creation of a higher city administration (Azambre 1955: 359), while at the same time an increasing amount of Chinese people were migrating to the area.<sup>2</sup> With the disappearance of river markets and the decree to spatially concentrate the sale of perishable goods (e.g. to today's Dong Xuan Market), traditional market trading was significantly reduced. Despite all these changes, the combination of living, working and proximity of handicraft, wholesaling, retailing and intermediate trade typical of the Ancient Quarter remained for the most part.

### **Hanoi during the Phase of State Economic Planning and Administration**

The communists' final assumption of power in 1954 represented a new era in the development of the city. As a consequence, the structure of the city was significantly influenced by socialist idealism and, in the process, the Ho Chi Minh government developed a similar sense of mission to the French before them. Of the numerous commanding socialist buildings erected in the city centre, the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, which was opened to the public in 1975, represents the most striking example. It was built on Ba Dinh Square on a key symbolic site – where Ho Chi Minh had read the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1945 (Logan 2000: 133/200f.). The Ba Dinh Square, which was converted into a typical socialist marching and parade ground, is the politically symbolic centre of the capital and therefore the nation (Logan 2000: 200f./214; Thomas 2002: 1617).

With the financial and technical support mainly of the Soviet Union or other socialist countries, many uniform residential areas were constructed at Hanoi's periphery (Marr 2002: 294/314f.). Through the construction of high-rise apartment blocks made from pre-fabricated elements (e.g. from 1960-1970 in Kim Lien living quarter, from 1970-75 in Giang Vo living quarter or from 1980-85 in Thanh Xuan living quarter) families were intended to be provided with exactly the same living space and living conditions (Tuan 1998: 39f.). Social spatial differences were supposed to be levelled out in the process. Obviously this idea mirrored socialist ideology. These

<sup>2</sup> Compared to Saigon or other South-East Asian cities, there has never been a large Chinese community in Hanoi. The number of Chinese was 850 in the year 1888, 2,908 in 1912 and 5,310 in 1940 (Papin 2001: 256). With about 13,000, their number reached its peak during the 1950s (Khanh 1993).

measures were planned, though unsuccessfully to reduce the acute lack of residential flats (Logan 1995<sup>B</sup>: 454f.).

During the phase of state economic planning and administration the expansion of the city was given a higher priority than the preservation of the Ancient Quarter and the protection of historical monuments. As in other socialist cities in Eastern Europe the structural interventions in the old city centre were comparatively few (Lichtenberger 1995: 30).

However, the Ancient Quarter still experienced important changes in socio-economic terms: approximately every fifth inhabitant had already fled to South Vietnam within the first few months of communist power out of fear of repression or expropriation (Nishimura/Phe 1990: 41). Among those who fled were the prosperous Chinese and Indian traders, who were often branded as "capitalists" or even worse, as "collaborators" (Heberer 1999: 6). With few exceptions, the businesses of those traders who had remained in the Ancient Quarter were nationalized and the craftsmen had to join co-operatives. Most retail space was converted into living areas and allocated to new inhabitants by the state. The state took over the role of private traders and opened sales premises in the largest retail areas in the Ancient Quarter through the founding of its own enterprises. On the whole, trading activities in the Ancient Quarter dropped heavily after 1955, there was no street trading and the street did not bustle (Thomas 2002: 1613). By 1960, private economic activities were said to have been virtually eliminated (Turley 1975: 376). It was only with reunification in 1976 that the private sector – at first on a black economy basis – once again came to life through the fostering of trade relations with Ho Chi Minh City (Nishimura/Phe 1990: 8; Fahey 1997: 471; Phe 2002: 473).

By and large, the phase of state economic planning and administration was plagued by economic stagnation and the consequences of the second Vietnam war. American bomb raids<sup>3</sup> repeatedly led to mass evacuations of the city's inhabitants (Turley 1975: 380f.). Economic shortages and neglect on the part of the city administration led to comparatively few structural changes in this area, thereby leaving Hanoi with one of the best preserved ancient quarters in South-East Asia (see Fig. 2).

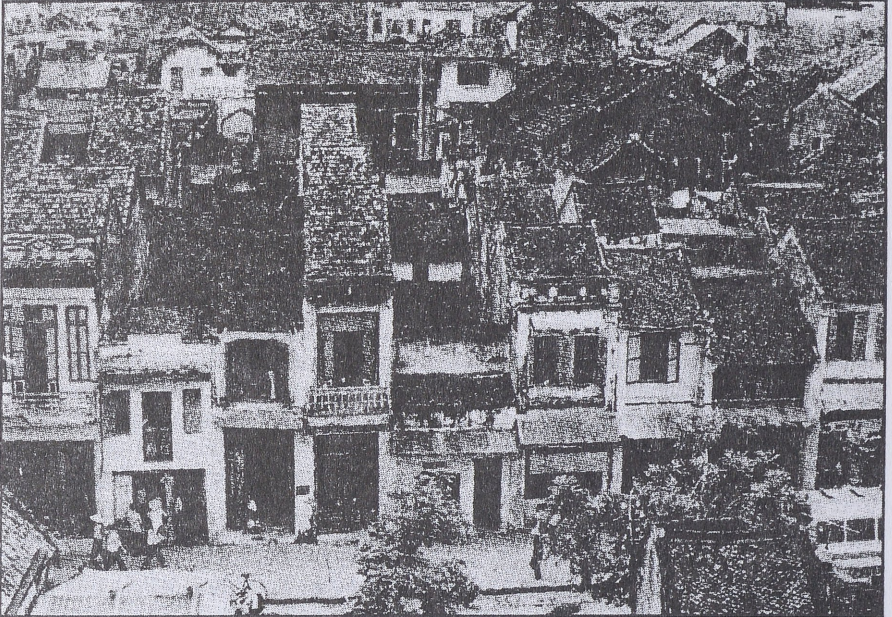
During the phase of state economic planning and administration, one of today's most famous painters of Vietnam, Bui Xuan Phai (1921-1988), made the Ancient Quarter the focal point of his work. His paintings in their palette of greys and browns show the Ancient Quarter bare of commerce, bustle or any activity (Templer 1998: 230; Papin 2001: 321f.) (see Fig. 3). Phai's melancholic views of Hanoi have contributed much to the rather nostalgic national consciousness and image of this cityscape.

### **Hanoi since the Introduction of the Doi Moi Reforms**

Renovation (Doi Moi) policy and the successive introduction of market-economy reforms opened the way for a modern consumer society. Average net incomes per capita almost doubled during the 1990s, for example (Weggel 2002: 156). The introduction of economic liberalisation and the opening up to global capital marked

<sup>3</sup> Most noticeably: Operation 'Rolling Thunder' which started in March 1965 and lasted 43 months as well as Operation 'Linebacker II' in December 1972.

**Fig. 2:** The Ancient Quarter during the phase of state economic planning and administration



Source: Nguyen Vinh Phuc 1995.

**Fig. 3:** The Ancient Quarter as seen in a painting by Bui Xuan Phai



Source: Bui Xuan Phai 1973, 20.5 x 35.5 cm.

the most recent phase of city development in Hanoi. Its first phase was characterized by a sharp increase in unregulated and illegal building activity (Smith & Scarpaci 2000: 753f.), a boom in the creation of private businesses by individuals or families and, as a result of the rapid rise of living standards, a sharp increase in private motor vehicles. Also, the city saw an emerging culture of restaurants and public consumption, which had formerly been unusual in Vietnam (Templer 1998: 77; Thomas 2002: 1613). Religion has also revived with Christian and Buddhist places of worship being frequented more than before (Logan 2000: 254).

In the course of these developments, the area of the city expanded enormously. In the 1990's the expansion became manifest mainly in uncontrolled suburbanisation processes primarily along arterial roads and also in the West Lake area. The new houses were mostly built on very small plots of land. One reason for this was high land prices. The buildings generally had 3-5 storeys and a very narrow façade of only 3-4 metres, so that they took on the appearance of 'vertical tube-houses'.

In the 1990's the West Lake area became a favoured settlement area of those who had profited from transition and in turn *privately* constructed impressive residential villas, normally without any state control (Schütte 2003: 109f.). In the last few years however, since about the start of the new millennium and along with institutional restructuring measures the *state sector* regained its leading role in urban building activities. State enterprises like the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUD) under the Ministry of Construction or Vinaconex have been developing many new urban areas in the periphery at the urban-rural fringe of Hanoi City.<sup>4</sup> These carefully planned new sites, provided with a well-equipped infrastructure, are very attractive for the upper and the quickly emerging new middle class of Hanoi City. In contrast, the flood plains of the Red River turned into a marginal settlement zone with slum-like buildings and became the destination of impoverished city residents as well as rural migrants (Boothroyd & Nam 2000: 92f.; Waibel 2001: 13).

Foreign and domestic investors (like the Vietcom Bank) mostly favoured the French colonial quarter. For this reason, the area has been subject to the fast-track development of a Central Business District (CBD), that usually accompanies internationalization and tertiarisation (Waibel 2003<sup>A</sup>: 35). Hotel and office blocks built by international joint-venture companies are evidence of this. Furthermore, some of the most modern western-style retail facilities of Hanoi are found here, such as the Trang Tien Plaza (opened in January 2002) at the corner of Trang Tien-, Hang Bai-, and Hai Ba Trung Street or the exquisite retail shops in the basement of Hanoi Towers in Hai Ba Trung Street.

While it is international protagonists who have changed the cityscape of the French colonial quarter the most, in Hanoi's Ancient Quarter local residents have played the most important role.

<sup>4</sup> Among the most prominent ones are Linh Dam, Trung Hoa – Nhan Chinh, My Dinh II, Nam Trung Yen or Dinh Cong Living Quarters. These new urban areas, most of which are still under construction at present (12/2003), are destinations for transition winners. Thus they are an architectural visualization of growing polarization of the city population.



## Revitalization

The immediate consequence for the Ancient Quarter was an enormous revitalization in both spatial and economic terms. An entrepreneurial boom in the private sector followed, mainly in retail. Already in 1988, almost every house in the central streets of the Ancient Quarter was using its frontage as a retailing outlet again (Nishimura/Phe 1990: 24). Traders and their families became the most important actors affecting the development of the Ancient Quarter. As no other economic branch of business reacts as quickly and dynamically to transitional processes on a national scale (Pütz 1998: 7), the author's empirical analysis was focussed on the research of retail activities. In the early stages of the transitional phase (1987/8-1992/3), this private sector boom was initiated by *local* inhabitants who transformed their tube house living quarters into private retail outlets. Probably nowhere else in urban Vietnam has a higher percentage of the local population benefited so quickly from the renovation policy.

## Displacement Processes

In the course of transition economic pressure on the Ancient Quarter increased significantly. New entrepreneurial actors from outside the 36 Streets Quarter have initiated modernization processes that have, in turn, triggered a development towards displacement. For example, within the sub-district of Hang Dao, which contains the main commercial axis of the Ancient Quarter, evidence shows that by 1999, that means more than a decade after the official recognition of private family business activities, already more than 25% of the private retail shops were run by families from outside the Ancient Quarter (Waibel 2002<sup>A</sup>: 246). These consisted of people who actually moved into the Ancient Quarter as well as families who just rented commercial space there. Over and above, the massive conversion of living space into commercial space has also had an impact in demographic terms: the centrally located Hoan Kiem district was the only urban district of Hanoi where the population decreased between the census of 1989 and 1999. With a drop of 22% the aforementioned sub-district of Hang Dao registered the biggest loss of population (Waibel 2002<sup>A</sup>: 175). This development of a so-called 'population caldera' is also typical of a market-economy-driven Central Business District-development.<sup>5</sup>

## Pavement Economy

Besides the boom in private retail trade shops, the area also became a prime location for street hawkers, who commute daily from the suburban countryside in order to sell goods such as vegetables, flowers or baskets. This development was labelled 'Pavement Economy' (see Forbes 1996: 62) and 'Ruralisation of Urban Landscape'.

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, there was an even bigger population loss within the city centre of Ho Chi Minh City in the same period of time: on average, the District No. 1 (which comprises most of the Central Business District of Vietnam's biggest city and economic hub) lost 11.8% of its population between 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1989 and 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1999. The highest population loss with even 37.9% of the district No. 1 was within sub-district Cau Ong Lanh (People's Committee of Ho Minh City 2004: Unpublished Census Data).

The city administration is trying to keep rural traders, mostly young women, out of the Ancient Quarter, officially in order to protect the safety of traffic. The more likely reason is that the hawkers do not fit into what the administration may define as its image of 'modern' city. Anyway, the local police is able to enforce this only along the main roads (like Hang Dao or Hang Gai Street) and during working hours.

The extension of business activities to the pavements and streets is, of course, a reaction to the limited space but also a symbol of the high commercial attractiveness of this quarter. Altogether, more than half a million people daily move in and out of the Ancient Quarter (Lim 2003).

### **Heterogeneous Trade Structures**

On the whole, trade structures are now very heterogeneous and multifaceted. Private and independent trade ownership structures are highly deconcentrated; the average shop size is very small: over 95% of the family retail outlets have a sales space of less than 50 m<sup>2</sup> (Waibel 2002<sup>B</sup>: 2). Such a high spatial-economic density and intensity of trade activities cannot be found anywhere else in Vietnam (and probably South-East Asia).

### **Stratification of Society**

Nevertheless, the entrepreneurial boom in private trading or in other service businesses during the course of the Doi Moi reforms also intensified the polarization of the income structures in the Ancient Quarter. Tube house residents able to convert their street front into retail space were generally able to profit more from the transition process than families living at the rear of the house (Rees 1997: 6; Phe 2002: 481). Overall, intra-urban disparities can be said to increase through a growing polarization of incomes. The retail business is thus a mirror image of social polarization, which can be described in terms of 'losers' and 'beneficiaries of transition' (Pütz 1998: 116). Empirical analysis led the author to differentiate four different social groups of actors which can be illustrated in the shape of an actor's pyramid. The basis of the pyramid and also the biggest group are trading people, who follow a strategy of survival. Most of the retired persons living in the Ancient Quarter for example, are to be included in this group. Their pensions are not sufficient to survive and so many of these losers of transition are forced to supplement their incomes by selling tea or other small goods on the pavement. The top of the pyramid and the smallest group are people who follow a strategy of increasing their affluence. These people often own considerable capital, have enjoyed a better education than the average, gained some entrepreneurial experience and in many cases have deliberately moved into this quarter for commercial reasons.

### **Development Pressure and Conflict of Objectives**

After 30 years of stagnation the Ancient Quarter in Hanoi faced a multitude of challenges in the end of the 1980s; due to overcrowding in many tube houses, the area had one the highest population densities in South-East Asia with a maximum of 1,900 inhabitants per hectare (Mathes 1995: 24). Altogether approx. 90,000 people

were living there in the most cramped of conditions: the amount of living space available per person, for example, had fallen to 1.5 m<sup>2</sup> in some neighbourhoods (Mathes 1995: 25). Open spaces such as the traditional courtyards had mostly been converted into living space over the past few decades. The engineering standard of most of the houses was poor and the technical infrastructure inadequate.

A surge in traffic led to unhealthy levels of noise and air pollution. Furthermore, the drastic increase in traffic volume has – as previously mentioned – intensified the already tense competition for land use within the area (SIDA/SWECO 1995: 14).

Shortly after the Doi Moi reforms, an unregulated boom in structural modernization and renovation, financed by transition profits, began in the Ancient Quarter as a reaction to the poor standard of accommodation and rising incomes. Beneficiaries of transition, who had profited from the revival of the quarter as a centre of commerce, no longer wanted to tolerate the sub-standard living conditions in the tube houses. A drastic increase of land prices in the Ancient Quarter<sup>6</sup> reinforced the inhabitant's desire to rebuild higher and bigger houses. The reconstruction or conversion of their residential buildings or the establishment of so-called mini hotels as a consequence of the increasing international and domestic tourism<sup>7</sup> seriously endangered the historic character of this evolved quarter (see Fig. 4).

### Approaches to Planning

International experts and organisations as well as local architects quickly recognised the potential of the Ancient Quarter and drafted million-dollar plans for its "rescue" with a great deal of enthusiasm. At first, lists were drawn up of buildings worth preserving, mainly temples and old meeting houses, which were not allowed to be altered or demolished. The planners were in agreement about the need to draw up construction law guidelines, such as the establishment of a minimum number of storeys per building in order to avoid the construction of new buildings which didn't fit into their surroundings. The town planning experts also called for a re-structuring of the relevant planning institutions, shifting from the hitherto top-down approach to bottom-up planning (Böhme/Körte/Toyka-Seid 2003: 169). Some of the planners wanted to radically reduce the density of the densely occupied tube houses and replace them with green areas and multi-storey buildings on the newly reclaimed free space. Further plans for the saving of the tube houses were restricted to mere cosmetic touches on the facade or to allocating them with new functions. On the whole, the different approaches were marked by an extreme lack of clarity in statement of objectives (Mathes 1995: 24/Varga-Toth 1999: 25; Boothroyd & Nam 2000: 91).

<sup>6</sup> A huge speculation boom in land and housing is currently engulfing Vietnam. Property prices in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City have increased four or fivefold in the last years (Son 2003: 14). Prices of land are now among the highest in the world. Expectations concerning the future economic welfare of Vietnam are very high and a driving force of speculation. Probably the most important reason is that investment in property is regarded as a safer method to invest money than deposits at a bank.

<sup>7</sup> Between the year 1990 and 2003 the number of international tourist arrivals in Vietnam increased from 250,000 to 2,429,000, this is an almost tenfold increase (www.vietnamtourism.com 2004).

Fig. 4: Newly erected buildings in the Ancient Quarter of Hanoi, Hang Bo Street



Credit: Michael Waibel 2002.

The implementation of all these plans foundered for four main reasons (Waibel 2003<sup>A</sup>: 36): firstly, the whole district is structured into small, fragmented plots of land, which represent a large obstacle to the implementation of large-scale planning

and redevelopment plans. Secondly, the city administration lacks the financial resources needed for large-scale redevelopment or resettlement measures. International organisations may have financed numerous plans but didn't provide financial backing for their concrete implementation. Thirdly, most of the inhabitants didn't want to be resettled by the state from the central district to outlying areas during the course of the redevelopment measures. Fourthly, there was a lack of appropriate institutions and suitably qualified specialist staff in the field of city architecture and town planning for the implementation of such projects.

Moreover, until the mid-1990's, there was a lack of planning guidelines and building regulations to protect the Ancient Quarter. Perhaps it is precisely this last point which was most responsible for the fact that the structural development in the Ancient Quarter was relatively uncontrolled in the beginning. A report revealed that already in 1993 half of all old buildings in the area had either been destroyed, rebuilt or renovated (Waibel 2000: 15).

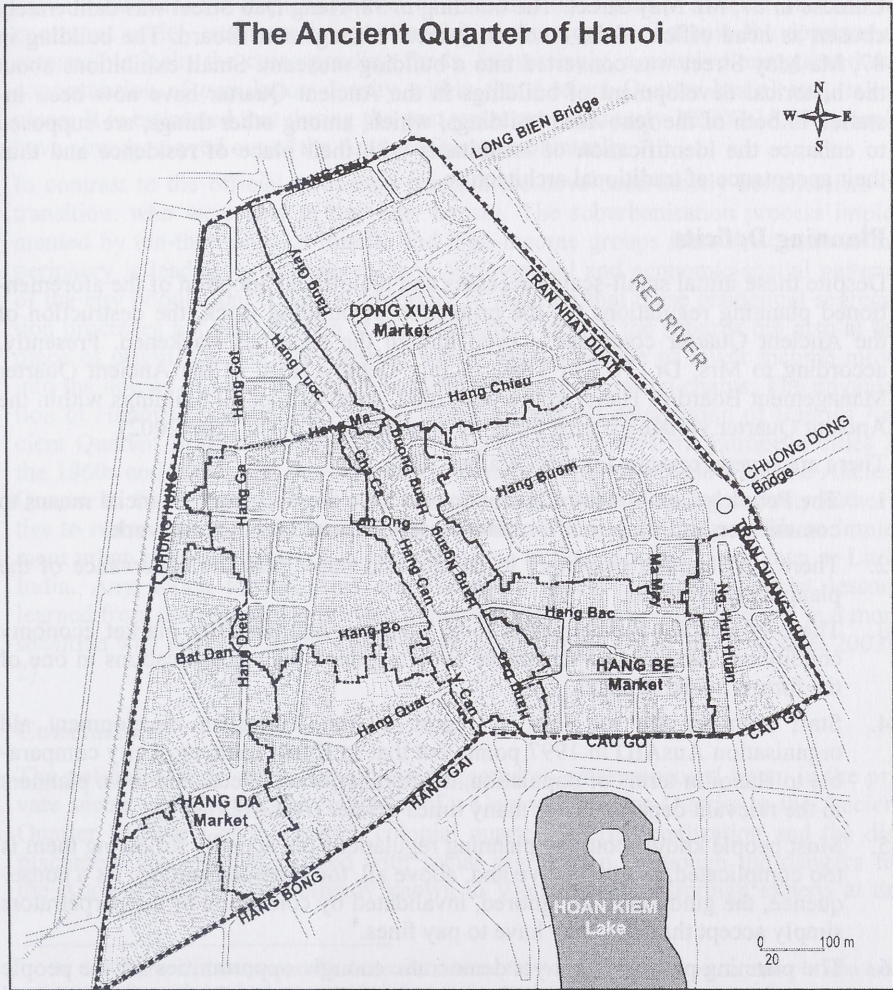
### **Modification of Levels of Planning and New Guidelines**

A masterplan for the whole urban area of Hanoi was first adopted in 1993 (Logan 1995<sup>A</sup>: 336). This plan, which in the meantime has been repeatedly updated, assigned the Ancient Quarter the role of centre of retail and tourism, which had to be preserved and renovated, but didn't include any individual measures concerning the protection of this district. At least high-rise buildings are not supposed to be constructed in the city centre anymore but will instead be built in new urban areas in the periphery of Hanoi (Logan 2000: 263).

It was only with the founding of a new department in 1992, the office of the Architect-in-Chief, that an administration at the communal level was created in order to centralise and simplify town planning (Nguyen 2000: 58). This department is supposed to have responsibility for the control of all building activity within the city boundaries as well as the definition of planning regulations for the areas worth preserving (Nguyen 2000: 58f.). The office of the Architect-in-Chief is directly under the control of the People's Committee of the City of Hanoi, the city's most important administrative body. The office of the Architect-in-Chief drafted initial guidelines concerning the preservation of the Ancient Quarter and these were officially approved by the People's Committee in August 1993. This contained the objective that all buildings which had been classified as monuments must be preserved and, where necessary, restored. Furthermore, a maximum number of three or four storeys respectively were established for buildings with a street front and those within residential blocks (Ton Anh Tuan 1999).

Two years later in 1995, the Architect-in-Chief proposed first administrative boundaries for the Ancient Quarter within which specific planning regulations were to apply (see Fig. 5). He also presented further individual measures for the protection of the Ancient Quarter to the People's Committee for approval. Approval of the official law was however, only granted in 1997 (Ton Anh Tuan 1999), illustrating the slow legislative decision-making processes within a still socialist planning bureaucracy (Wiegandt 1997: 368).

Fig. 5: Administrative boundaries of the Ancient Quarter, approved in 1997



Source: M. Waibel; Base Map: Ng. Vu Phuong 2001.

In order to further improve the protection of the Ancient Quarter, a new department, the so-called Ancient Quarter Management Board, was created in early 1998. In spring 2000, at the occasion of the 990<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hanoi, the Ancient Quarter Management Board was, for the first time, able to oversee the professional restoration of two buildings in the Ancient Quarter with financial assistance from the French city of Toulouse, the Region of Brussels-Capital, the EU and other institutional donors (Region of Brussels-Capital 2004).

The buildings in question were a meeting house dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century in 38, Hang Dao Street and a about 110 years old residential and retail building built by Chinese in 87, Ma May Street. The building in 38, Hang Dao Street was deliberately chosen as head office of the Ancient Quarter Management Board. The building in 87, Ma May Street was converted into a building museum. Small exhibitions about the historical development of buildings in the Ancient Quarter have now been installed in both of the renovated buildings, which, among other things, are supposed to enhance the identification of inhabitants with their place of residence and thus their acceptance of traditional architecture.

### Planning Deficits

Despite these initial small-scale successes and the official adoption of the aforementioned planning regulations for the protection of building stock, the destruction of the Ancient Quarter continues – even though the pace has slackened. Presently, according to Mrs. Dr. To Thi Toan, Acting Deputy Head of the Ancient Quarter Management Board of Hanoi in the year 2002, over 40% of all buildings within the Ancient Quarter violate existing building regulations (To Thi Toan 2002).

There are several reasons for this (Waibel 2000: 16):

1. The People's Committee of Hanoi doesn't have the necessary financial means to commission and support affordable preservation and renovation work.
2. There isn't enough personnel to control and implement the observance of the planning regulations.
3. There is a lack of experienced town planners familiar with market economy conditions. Almost all Vietnamese experts gained their qualifications in one of the former socialist states.
4. Staff numbers are too low. A report by the Australian development aid organisation AusAID in 1997 points out that in Kuala Lumpur, a city comparable to Hanoi in terms of population, the number of architects and town planners in the relevant departments is many times greater (AusAID 1997).
5. Most people know about the planning regulations but actually following them is too complicated, too expensive and, above all, too time-consuming. As a consequence, the guidelines are ignored, invalidated by corruption or the perpetrators simply accept that they may have to pay fines.<sup>8</sup>
6. The planning process is not yet democratic enough: opportunities for the people to participate are insufficient (Rees 1997: 9). For example, community-based development schemes do not exist so far.

In the year 2000, plans were published to gradually resettle 20,000 people – about 25% of the Ancient Quarter's population – to new residential areas on the periphery of Hanoi (e.g. the precincts of Long Bien and Gia Lam east of the Red River) up to

<sup>8</sup> One example is the legal requirement for traditional tile roofs. Nevertheless most people actually prefer to build flat roofs as this offers the possibility to dry laundry or relax in the evening. Another example is the legal requirement to use traditional wood doors. These wood doors are either not available or too expensive (To Thi Toan 2002).

the year 2010 (To Thi Toan 2002). The target residents are primarily those who lost out in the process of transition and have been living in very poor conditions until now.<sup>9</sup> However, the implementation of this ambitious plan – at least on such an enormous scale – seems to be questionable at the moment, because the department responsible lacks the corresponding funds. Interestingly, a massive unregulated de-concentration of population density within the Ancient Quarter has already taken place: It is estimated that during the past years approximately 10,000-15,000 people have already moved out of the Ancient Quarter voluntarily.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to the official relocation plans, these have been mostly beneficiaries of transition, who were able to buy new houses. The suburbanisation process implemented by ten-thousands of middle and high-income groups from the centre to the periphery is leading to completely new socio-spatial and economic-spatial patterns of the city population. It seems important to mention that these residential segregation processes not only happen at the destination area in the suburbs but also at the place of origin, the Ancient Quarter, where usually people of lower income move into the houses of those leaving thus starting typical migration chains. The upvaluation of Hanoi's periphery may conflict with a potential devaluation of Hanoi's Ancient Quarter. Similar developments have happened in Western European cities in the 1960s and 1970s. On the other side, the moving-out of people from the Ancient Quarter to the new urban areas may be a chance for town planning and city authorities to restructure the tube house fabric. Finally, it may even be possible to implement urban renewal measures as has been done in Singapore's China Town or Little India. Any action towards this aim however, should take into account lessons learned from the experience in other countries and should be implemented in a more sensitive way than e.g. in the China Town of Singapore (Huat 2002; Waibel 2003<sup>B</sup>: 2).

## Conclusions

The politics of renewal in Hanoi have triggered an entrepreneurial boom in the private sector, a fast-track development of a Central Business District in the Ancient Quarter and parts of the French colonial quarter, internationalization and the displacement processes associated with social segregation. Although the dangers for the Ancient Quarter were already known to Vietnamese and foreign experts at the

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<sup>9</sup> In the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the proposed resettlement scheme for example, target group are people who have occupied pagodas and others sacral buildings in the Ancient Quarter during phase of state economic planning and administration (To Thi Toan 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly the population in sub-district Hang Dao increased steadily till 1997 and decreased sharply after 1997, at least according to official figures. A serious interpretation of this development seems difficult. The figures may suggest, that at the beginning of the transition period the revitalization led to immigration and that not until 1997 a substantial part of the population could afford to move out of this district and to buy new houses. It does not even seem unlikely that the implementation of new detailed building regulations in 1997 has had a certain effect on the inhabitant's decision not to stay and 'renovate' their houses within the Ancient Quarter but to move away. In general you have to assume, that the real population figures within the Ancient Quarter are even lower because some people who have already moved out, still keep registered there in order to be able to continue doing trade activities.



beginning of the Doi Moi reforms, there was a large time lag until counteractive measures to the processes of transition were taken and put into practice by the town planners (Wiegandt 1997: 368). The streets of the Ancient Quarter may no longer resemble the famous paintings of Bui Xuan Phai, it is nevertheless perhaps more important to protect the character, identity and, above all, the vitality of this historic trading and commercial quarter than to force the inhabitants to continue living in inadequate conditions. It is the unique vibrancy, the combination of wholesale, retail trade, handicraft and the pavement as a living and working space in the Ancient Quarter that seems to fascinate people from all over the world as well as those from Vietnam itself. However, life in public space is generally a result of limited space *inside* the tube houses (Huat 2002). In this case the so-called vibrancy is a mere result of poverty. Nevertheless, in the preservation of the Ancient Quarter should be ensured a maximum participation of local residents in order to give them a share in the determination of their 'way of life'.

Current processes of internationalization and modernization are difficult to control through planning measures. Unregulated developments are typical of transition periods as state institutions move beyond the centrally organized economy and adapt to a pluralistic market economy. Many Eastern European cities have had to deal with similar problems. All in all, it is important to accept that the Ancient Quarter has been characterised by constant changes in the past (e.g. the influx of Chinese immigrants from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the impact of the French colonial administration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or of the socialist bureaucracy after 1954). The nature and extent of these economic and social spatial changes are heavily influenced by the persisting structural and physiognomic characteristics of the city, which in turn are the result of historical processes of transition<sup>11</sup> (Waibel 2002<sup>A</sup>: 249). The rapidly changing urban culture is thus to be seen as a source of the Ancient Quarter's vitality. The Doi Moi policy only forms the latest stage in a series of historical transition processes influencing Hanoi's development. It is impossible to turn this traditional quarter into a museum (Mathes 1995: 25), even though many Western tourists (and planners) like to romanticize the area as an almost medieval market place.

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<sup>11</sup> Rivet (2000) has shown similar structural and architectural persistencies for the central parts of Yangon/Myanmar, which were important for the socio-economic use of space after the begin of the opening policy in 1988. In contrast to the Ancient Quarter however, the colonial quarter of Yangon has never been regarded as integral part of the national identity but either as "Ingaleik", "Kala" or "Tayok", that means English, Indian or Chinese (Rivet 2000: 196).

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